

Aceh Conflict Monitoring Update

1st May – 30th June 2008

World Bank



The number of conflicts reached new highs in May and June, a rise mostly driven by a swelling number of administrative disputes.¹ Violence stayed at the relatively high levels recorded since December of last year. A series of incidents occurred along the border between the central highlands and Aceh Utara. It started with what was reported as a terror attack by Bener Meriah's troops on a village across the frontier in Nisam Antara. The incident, reminiscent of the conflict years, was followed by demands from Bener Meriah villagers to be incorporated into Aceh Utara and by a murder attempt on a village official. Despite indications that the incidents related mainly to illegal logging, the cases quickly spread into a wider confrontation between GAM figures, including Governor Irwandi, and Bener Meriah's Bupati, with mutual accusations of manipulating violence to serve political interests. This shows how community tensions and wider political issues can interact to create a polarized atmosphere, of concern as preparation for next year's elections intensifies. The potential for further incidents is especially high in the central highlands, as the chances of success of the formation of a new Aceh Leuser Antara (ALA) province separated from Aceh are weakening, and its supporters look with anxiety at the expansion of Partai Aceh in neighboring districts. The controversy surrounding the selection of district-level Independent Election Commissions (KIP) was a reminder that ensuring transparent and fair election processes will be key to mitigating tensions. May and June were also marked by a high number of vigilante incidents, a possible consequence of the Islamic Police's recent withdrawal from enforcement operations. A report by IFC raised awareness of the extent of extortion in Aceh and prompted authorities to take drastic measures. This is a positive development, but changes will need to be implemented carefully to avoid fuelling suspicion between security forces and KPA. On May 14th, a grenade exploded in front of the office of an international NGO in Bireuen. Aside from this, levels of aid-related conflict remained stable with little violence. However, conflicts related to post-conflict assistance jumped in June, underlining two issues: the poor implementation of aid programs to conflict victims in the central highlands, and the insufficient attention paid to non-GAM ex-combatants.

Regional tensions along the border between Aceh Utara and the Central Highlands

In May and June, a series of incidents occurred along the border between Bener Meriah and inland Aceh Utara. These cases, one of which led to a fatality, demonstrate that the situation remains volatile in the frontier area separating the central highlands from the east coast's GAM strongholds. They reveal how community-level tensions and wider political issues can mutually reinforce and inflame each other, fuelling the potential for further escalation, especially as next year's elections draw closer.

Tensions started on June 3rd when local communities reported that armed troops had crossed the border from Bener Meriah and attacked Alue Dua, a remote village in the mountains of Nisam Antara, Aceh Utara, terrorizing inhabitants with random shooting and the arson of huts

¹ As part of an analytical support program to the peace process, the Conflict and Development Program, within the World Bank Office Indonesia and with funding from the UK's Department for International Development, is using a newspaper conflict mapping methodology to record and categorize all incidents of conflict in Aceh as reported in two provincial newspapers (Serambi and Aceh Kita). The Program publishes updates available online at www.conflictanddevelopment.org. The dataset is available for those interested; contact Blair Palmer at bpalmer@wboj.or.id or Adrian Morel at amorel1@worldbank.org. There are limitations to using newspapers to map conflict; see Barron and Sharpe (2005) available at www.conflictanddevelopment.org/page.php?id=412.

and motorbikes (see Box 1 for a detailed chronology of incidents).² Bener Meriah's Police Chief admitted that police and the military were conducting a joint operation in the area to collect evidence of illegal logging but denied the use of violence. Two weeks later, communities from villages in Bener Meriah, close to the border with Nisam Antara, demanded to be incorporated into Aceh Utara. They said that the Bener Meriah government was paying no attention to their needs and that they did not want to be part of a separate ALA province.³ On June 30th, Ardiansyah, a sub-village head in the area, was assaulted by armed men. His pregnant wife was killed in the shooting. Ardiansyah attributed the attack to KPA members close to illegal loggers targeted by the security forces' operation in Nisam Antara, who accused him of being an informant.

The latter incident quickly escalated into a wider political confrontation between KPA, Governor Irwandi Yusuf and Bener Meriah's District Head Tagore Abubakar. Tagore, a leader of former pro-Jakarta militias (PETA) and a partisan of ALA, declared that "the security situation in the central highlands is now similar to that of the conflict years" due to the actions of armed groups hostile to the partition of the province, and demanded Jakarta's intervention. KPA and Irwandi denounced the Bupati's attempts at politicizing the case. The Governor implied that the incident might be linked to manipulations by "certain parties" aiming at stirring "horizontal conflict between communities of the coast and the highlands, between GAM and non-GAM."⁴

Box 1: Aceh Utara / Bener Meriah frontier incidents, May and June

- *May 29th, Nisam Antara, Aceh Utara.* While conducting a joint weapons sweeping operation across the border, Bener Meriah police and military troops arrested four illegal loggers.
- *May 30th – 31st, Jabal Antara sub-village, Alue Dua village, Nisam Antara.* According to reports by community members, 30 armed men in uniform crossed the border from Bener Meriah and attacked the village, burning down three huts, damaging four motorbikes and shooting a buffalo.
- *June 4th-9th.* Bener Meriah's Police Chief confirmed that troops went back to Nisam Antara on May 30th to collect tree logs as evidence but denied allegations of violence. KPA questioned the involvement of the military, while Aceh military commander Major Supiadin implied that the attack was staged. An investigation by the Communication and Coordination Forum for Peace in Aceh (FKK) was inconclusive.
- *June 12th, Lhokseumawe.* Hundreds from Seni Antara and Rikit Musara villages, Permata sub-district, Bener Meriah, traveled to Lhokseumawe to demand the incorporation of their villages into Aceh Utara.
- *June 30th, 2a.m., Seni Antara village, Permata, Bener Meriah.* Armed men attacked the house of Bukit Antara sub-village's head, Ardiansyah, injuring him seriously and killing his pregnant wife.
- *July 2nd.* Ardiansyah, the victim of the attack, acknowledged he had received threats from KPA who accused him of being an informant (*cuak*). Bener Meriah's Bupati, Tagore, alleged a link between the June 30th incident and the ALA issue. He demanded the central government's intervention to "crack down on armed groups". "The Bupati showed his true colors as a PETA leader", said KPA.
- *July 4th.* Governor Irwandi denounced misinformation by Tagore and the intelligence services. He attributed the murder attempt to rogue groups of ex-combatants "hostile to the peace process", adding that these groups could not operate without the support of "certain parties who use them to serve their own agenda".

The motivations of the Nisam Antara alleged attack and the June 30th shooting seem to revolve mainly around illegal logging and personal revenge. Regarding the former incident, it is possible that a regular law enforcement operation spun out of control, that Bener Meriah security forces deliberately decided to set an example, or that KPA-linked illegal loggers tried

² Alue Dua was the site of a previous incident in March 2007, when KPA members assaulted four soldiers hired as security by Save the Children.

³ Aceh Leuser Antara is a proposed new province to be carved from Aceh, which would encompass Bener Meriah, Aceh Tengah, Gayo Lues, Aceh Tenggara and Aceh Singkil districts (see January-February 2008 Update).

⁴ Irwandi Yusuf, *Medan Bisnis*, July 4th. During his visit in Aceh and Jakarta in early May, Martti Ahtisaari, former president of Finland and chairman of the Crisis Management Initiative, also conveyed to Major Supiadin concerns about alleged intelligence operations in Aceh. Supiadin denied such operations were taking place.

to frame a targeted attack on their operations as an aggression against civilians. A combination of the three is most likely. Ardiansyah's murder attempt can more confidently be seen as a revenge attack by illegal loggers.

These incidents occurred against a wider backdrop of increased communal, political and economic tensions in the area:

- **Community-level tensions.** KPA commands wide support in Nisam Antara, a GAM stronghold and one of the areas most severely affected by the conflict. Across the border in Bener Meriah, villagers loyal to GAM and PETA supporters often coexist in the same locations. Recent field visits in the area by World Bank researchers, found that relations between local ex-combatants from opposite sides have significantly improved compared to 2006. However, the ALA issue helped revive tensions and suspicions.
- **Political issues.** Although the chances of success of ALA seem increasingly thin (see next section), it still generates strong support among Bener Meriah's political elite, ethnically Javanese communities, and militia elements. Those who tried to secede from Bener Meriah in June were Gayo people who supported GAM during the conflict and who reportedly felt increasingly isolated and unsafe.⁵ On the other hand, pro-ALA elements are concerned by the blossoming of Partai Aceh's red banners across the east coast GAM strongholds. They believe that if the party wins a large majority of seats in the provincial parliament, it might command enough leverage to propose a referendum on independence.
- **Economic interests.** Illegal logging is widespread on both sides of the border, and reportedly involves both Bener Meriah's elites and KPA. The former, irritated at the perceived leniency of provincial authorities towards KPA, may have decided to take the matter in their own hands and to send a message to loggers operating from Nisam Antara. Moreover, despite KPA's relative weakness in Bener Meriah, contractors linked to the organization managed to secure significant public projects, including the rehabilitation of 40 km of road linking Bener Meriah to Nisam Antara.

A similar mix of community issues, political tensions and resource competition appeared to be at play in the events that led to the Atu Lintang massacre in Aceh Tengah on March 1st of this year (see January-February 2008 Update). Such pressures may increase with the temptation for pro-ALA militants to make desperate attempts to reverse recent political setbacks.

Political conflicts: thinning chances for ALA/ABAS; the preparation of next year's elections already generates controversy

The legislative process initiated in January to split Aceh and create two new provinces, Aceh Leuser Antara and Aceh Barat Selatan (see January/February 2008 Updates), suffered a setback in late May when the draft law failed to be incorporated onto the DPR's agenda for this year. On June 17th, Governor Irwandi also reported that Vice-President Kalla had assured him of his opposition to the project.⁶ ALA/ABAS chances of success in the short-term now seem limited. However, ALA militants remain mobilized, and field visits suggest that they would interpret a landslide victory of Partai Aceh in 2009 as a direct threat to their security. As a result, tensions are likely to continue and increase through the electoral campaign.

The selection of the members of district-level Independent Election Commissions (KIP Kabupaten), a first critical step in the preparation of the 2009 elections, was met with widespread controversy. KIP regulations supposedly bar from membership individuals close

⁵ Interview with an Aceh Utara KPA figure, July 14th.

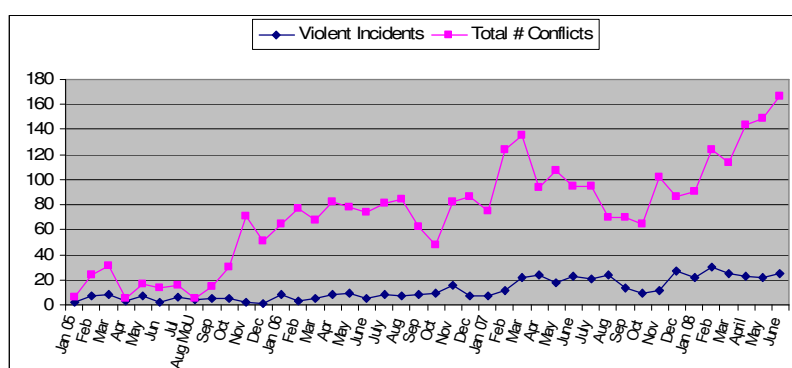
⁶ Reports on the same day that President Yudhoyono had signed a mandate authorizing the Department of Home Affairs to initiate discussions with the parliament on the matter gave new hopes to ALA/ABAS partisans and infuriated Irwandi, who threatened to resign. However, both reactions seem disproportionate as the document, an administrative formality, has little political significance.

to political parties or who held or ran for elected positions within the past five years. Nevertheless, dozens of those who were selected hold cadre positions in local political parties or are otherwise affiliated with political organizations or individuals. Such irregularities were reported in eleven districts. During the 2006 elections, some district-level commissioners appeared to suffer from political bias, including in Aceh Tenggara where the local KIP backed losing incumbent Bupati Desky against the arbitration of the provincial KIP. Locally, the dispute led to a series of violent incidents, including bombings and arsons, which peaked in August 2007. Although the situation has now calmed, field visits in November of last year found that the population of Aceh Tenggara remained deeply divided and tensions were palpable (see November 2007 Update). Enforcing regulations and fighting nepotism and corruption from this early stage is key to ensuring fair and transparent elections in 2009.

The number of conflicts continues to rise, violence remains high

In May and June, the number of conflicts continued to increase to reach its third new record high in a row, with 149 new conflicts reported in May and 166 in June (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Violent LL incidents and total # of LL conflicts, by month



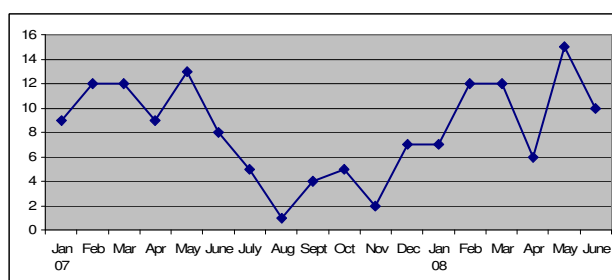
This rise was mostly driven by a swelling number of administrative disputes, which steadily increased through 2008 to reach 67% of all new conflicts in June. These revolve mainly around the management of public funds and programs, including post-tsunami and post-conflict assistance. The rise of fuel prices, which resulted in massive rallies in Jakarta and all over Indonesia, only led to a limited number of protests and demonstrations in Aceh.

Violence remained at the same high levels experienced since December of last year, with 22 cases reported in May and 25 in June. Serious armed violence cases, such as shootings and grenade incidents, continued to occur (see the section on border incidents and the section on aid-related conflicts). However, the last two months were marked by an increased proportion of fatalities linked to disputes between community members over personal or economic issues. Out of the eight deaths in May and June, six could reasonably be attributed to such cases.

Vigilantism back to high levels, as the Islamic Police adopts a lower profile

After a drop in 2007, the number of violent incidents resulting from vigilantism has risen again in 2008 (see Figure 2). 15 cases were reported in May and 10 in June. Two thirds (9 of 15) were targeted at illegitimate couples, while the rest were actions against thieves. The latter cases can result in sadistic violence, as in Aceh Utara on June 14th, when villagers tried, without success, to chop off the hand of a goat thief. A total of nine people were reported to be injured as a result of May and June’s vigilante actions, but the number is likely higher.

Figure 2: Vigilante incidents from January 07 - June 08, per month



These incidents raise questions as to the role taken by communities in maintaining order and enforcing Islamic law. Vigilantism has been spurred by the poor achievements of the Islamic Police (*Wilayatul Hisbah* - WH), whose efficiency has been impaired by a lack of human and financial resources as well as its unpopularity. Many Acehnese, especially GAM, see the WH as a legacy of Jakarta's attempts at diverting the public's attention from independence claims. The WH's image has also been tarnished by a number of sex scandals involving its staff and the perception that it targets only the poor, while misbehaving elites manage to avoid punishment. WH agents have regularly been the victims of beatings by irritated community members. On June 9th, a Molotov cocktail was thrown at a WH vehicle in Banda Aceh.

These factors led to the reconsideration of the WH's role. On April 1st, the WH was integrated into Satuan Polisi Pamong Praja (Satpol PP), a regular line agency in charge of public order, with its new function limited to socializing Islamic law.⁷ According to an interview with a WH official, the role of enforcing Sharia at the community level could soon be handed over to traditional village institutions, such as elders' councils (*Tuha Peut*) and local *imam*. Whether such changes will reduce or increase the likelihood of violence being used against offenders remains uncertain.

Attempts at eradicating extortion in Aceh

On May 28th, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) released the findings of a survey reporting widespread extortion by GAM/KPA (*pajak nanggroe*) and security forces of investors, private contractors, public projects and aid programs in Aceh. The next day, the Aceh Timur branch of the Aceh Contractors Association (AKA) confirmed the findings, deploring the impact of such practices on the quality of projects.

The IFC report generated a public debate on the matter prompting authorities to take concrete measures. On June 4th, the Aceh Police Chief announced the formation of a special "extortion hunting" unit (*unit pemburu pungli*), replicating the structure of previous ad-hoc units formed to fight armed robberies and kidnappings, with elements from the anti-terrorism 88 Special Department, paramilitary police (*Brimob*) and Criminal Investigation Section.

Extortion is only one type of unhealthy practice that has been on the rise with the explosion of reconstruction projects in Aceh. Many KPA field commanders took advantage of the political leverage gained from 2006 electoral victories to invest massively in the contracting business, securing tenders for GAM-controlled companies or brokering their influence to other contractors. This deepened internal tensions between ex-combatants located in strategic areas and those from more isolated regions or with poorer access to patronage networks. On the other hand, it sometimes brought together conflict-era enemies. In some areas KPA, security forces and local authorities have reportedly made tacit agreements to share the windfalls equally. In others, KPA and militia are members of the same contractors' associations.

Whether the new efforts to crack down on extortion will be backed by sufficient political will to be successful remains unknown. Their efficacy will also be contingent on the security forces' own ability to reform and renounce deeply-rooted bad habits. Besides, operations will need to target indiscriminately all actors involved and avoid giving ground to KPA's perception that their main objective is to cut Partai Aceh from a source of funding.

⁷ The integration of WH to Satpol PP has been completed at province level. Implementation at district level is ongoing and should be finalized over the course of the year.

Aid-related conflicts: grenade incident targeted at an international NGO; BRA programs face increasing protests

34 new aid-related conflicts were reported in May and 33 in June. This is relatively high, as the monthly number of aid conflicts varied around an average of 25 since January 2006. Figure 3 shows that these conflicts also tend to result in an increasing number of complaints, demonstrations and other incidents.⁸ Unsolved issues lead to growing frustration and protests drag on longer (see March-April Update). Cases of aid-related violence remain isolated and very rarely result in aggression towards international NGOs. An exception was recorded on May 14th when a grenade exploded outside the office of Save the Children in Bireuen (see Box 2).

Figure 3 also shows that protests and complaints related to post-conflict assistance peaked in June, with 15 incidents, the highest number recorded since the MoU. June's main issues were related to allegations of wrongdoings in the delivery of aid to conflict victims in the central highlands, and to the lack of assistance to GAM combatants who surrendered before the MoU. GAM who surrendered were often "re-educated" by TNI and considered as "traitors" by KPA.

Box 2: Grenade incident at the office of Save the Children in Bireuen
 On May 14th in Bireuen, a fragmentation grenade was lobbed into the yard of Save the Children's office. The explosion caused no injuries and little material damage. The NGO's own assessment labelled it an intimidation attempt, possibly by a contractor. Grenade incidents have been a common pattern of post-war Aceh, and aid agencies are frequently the victims of intimidation by unscrupulous parties eager to secure tenders or other forms of retribution (see previous section on extortion). However, this case was the first grenade incident targeting an international NGO in Aceh since the MoU. On March 21st, 2007, four soldiers hired as security by Save the Children were beaten by KPA members in Nisam Antara, Aceh Utara. However, there is no evidence of a link between the two cases.

Figure 3: Aid-related incidents from June 07 - June 08, per month

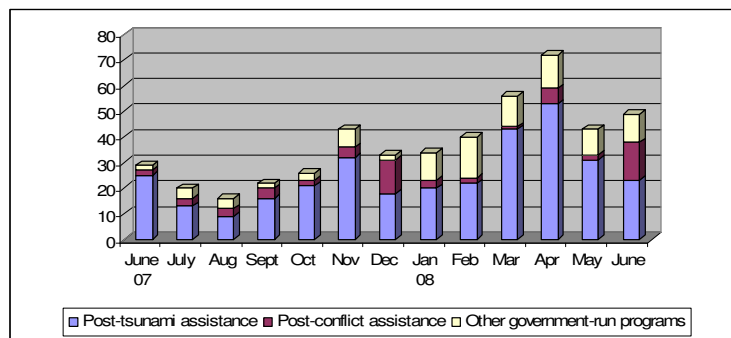


Table 1: June's main issues related to conflict assistance

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> BRA's monitoring department (<i>Badan Pengawas</i>) reported numerous irregularities in the selection of beneficiaries of various BRA programs, mostly in the Central Highlands |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conflict victims from Aceh Tengah and Bener Meriah, who had taken part in massive rallies in Banda Aceh in December of last year, demonstrated at the provincial High Court to demand a proper investigation of allegations of fund embezzlement related to the reconstruction of houses damaged during the conflict. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints over insufficient assistance to ex-GAM combatants who surrendered before the MoU. |

The poor implementation of post-conflict programs in the central highlands, and weak support to GAM who surrendered, cannot be simply attributed to a lack of political will from the provincial government and BRA. Assistance to GAM who surrendered is implemented by a line agency (*Kesbanglinmas*), not BRA. Besides, irregularities in the central highlands, including wrongdoings related to the housing program for conflict victims, seem to involve mostly local elites and administrations, as illustrated by the findings of an audit conducted earlier this year by the Financial Control Agency (BPKP). For example, the audit revealed that the assistance funds to PETA members for Year 2007 (US\$ 88,500) never reached the beneficiaries, and accumulated instead in bank accounts controlled by militia figures such as the PETA Head for Bener Meriah, Adijan, and Bupati Tagore Abubakar.

⁸ We tabulate both the number of *conflicts* and *incidents* each month. A conflict over a plot of land, for example, might lead to several incidents, such as a protest, a demonstration and a blockade.